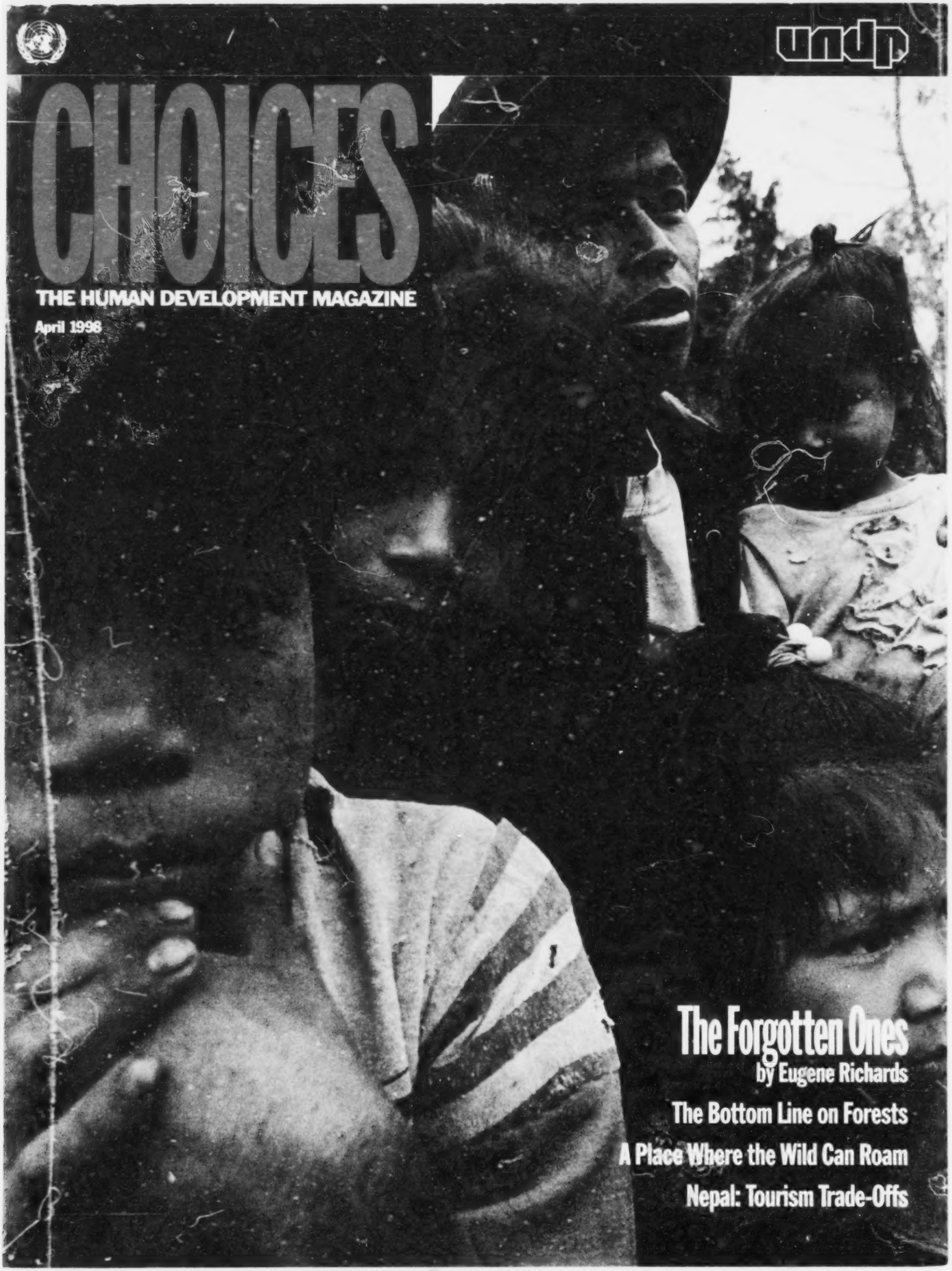


CHOICES

THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

April 1998

The Forgotten Ones
by Eugene Richards

The Bottom Line on Forests

A Place Where the Wild Can Roam

Nepal: Tourism Trade-Offs

FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

Danny Glover is perhaps best known as Mel Gibson's sidekick in the popular film series *Lethal Weapon*. But although he is at home with Hollywood's rich and famous, he is still very much in touch with the world's downtrodden.

Glover has embraced social causes ranging from civil rights to the abolition of the death penalty to support for the rights of minorities. He was a crusader in the struggle against racial apartheid in South Africa, using his art to denounce the abhorrent system that eventually toppled.

But Glover's commitment to humanitarian causes did not stop with the victory in South Africa. As UNDP's first "Goodwill Ambassador," he is today using his international stature to defend the cause of the most vulnerable people on our planet—the 1.3 *billion* living in extreme poverty. In his readiness to support UNDP efforts in the worldwide struggle against poverty, he follows in the footsteps of other celebrities such as Harry Belafonte and Audrey Hepburn for UNICEF.

"I hope to see people taking charge of their existence, rebuilding their lives; above all, I hope to use my voice to make theirs heard," he told journalists in New York during a press conference on 4 March, when his new role was announced.

Glover is no stranger to UNDP's world. "My first thought as a major in economics at San Francisco State University was to go to Tanzania," he said, "because I was so moved by the work of Julius Nyerere and what was happening in that country."

In the coming months, Glover will visit some of UNDP's programmes, starting in Africa.

Glover's gesture on behalf of UNDP and the people it represents is particularly timely. December 1998 will mark the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which the international community affirmed its commitment to the dignity and worth of the individual. As stated in the Declaration: "Everyone has the right to work. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care, and necessary social services.... Everyone has the right to education." In short, every individual has the right to development.

The son of union organizers, Glover was one of the winners of the first annual William Kunstler Racial Justice Awards for his work in civil rights and on behalf of minorities. After his acclaimed performance in the movie *The Color Purple*, Glover received the Image Prize from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the oldest organization in the United States supporting the rights of the African-American community. His next screen appearance will be in *Beloved*, an adaptation of the book by Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison, in which a woman escapes slavery during the US Civil War but is haunted by dark memories.

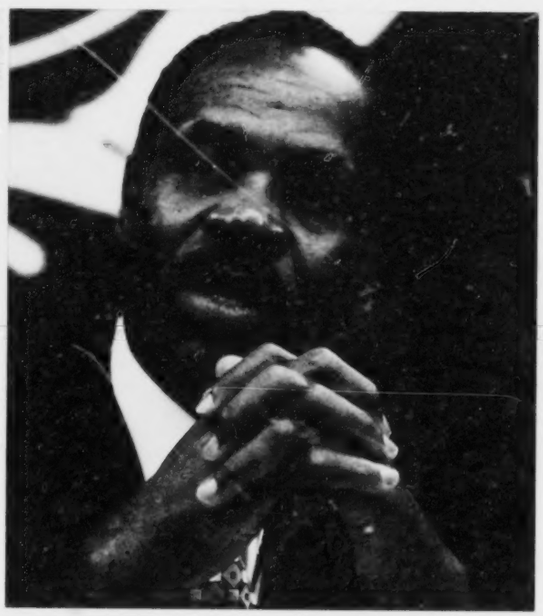
Indeed, the leap between slavery and entrapment by poverty is not a hard one to make.

"There seems to be some sort of connectedness between the way my life has gone... to embracing those ideals, those programmes and those desires of UNDP," Glover told journalists at United Nations headquarters.

"We all have our place in the international community, and this honour you have bestowed upon me will provide me with an opportunity to speak out for what needs to be done in this world," Glover said, accepting his duties as Goodwill Ambassador.

The world needs more friends like Danny Glover.

Djibril Diallo



▶ **Danny Glover, UNDP's new Goodwill Ambassador**

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CHOICES

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VALUING THE FORESTS NOT JUST THE TREES

If forests are to be saved, their true economic worth must be taken into account.

By Marc J. Dourojeanni

The paradox—and the poignancy—of the destruction of Latin American forests is that they are worth far more standing than they are cut or burned down. And yet it is economic forces, by and large, that are laying these forests to waste.

Even optimistic estimates show the annual rate of deforestation in Latin America to be proceeding at rates significantly higher than those forecast a decade ago. Every burning season, airports in many Amazonian cities are forced to close, as smoke from tens of thousands of forest fires—many of them set to clear land—create a dense fog, sometimes as vast as the Amazon Basin itself. The worst year on record was 1995, when government figures showed that the amount of deforestation had tripled since 1991. Out-of-control fires over much of Brazil's Roraima state in February and March of this year suggest that the warming effects of the latest El Niño are producing unprecedented conflagrations.

The shrinking of the Brazilian Amazon has captured the most public attention. But in relative terms, forests are disappearing even more quickly in El Salvador, Haiti and Jamaica (more than three per cent lost per year) and Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua (with more than two per cent lost each year).

International pressure and public outcry have not slowed the burning and logging of Latin American forests. Instead, the intensity of deforestation has been reinvigorated by the recent economic stability of the region.

A proliferation of institutions and commissions set up to deal with forestry issues has not helped matters. Today there are virtually no managed forests in Latin America; efforts to produce sustainable timber yields have thus far been shown to be unprofitable. Virgin forests are simply logged and cleared.

The *Agenda 21* chapter on forests, drawn up at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and a number of other important international agreements all affirm the critical need for saving forests. Yet their demolition continues unabated.

Misdirected economic forces lie at the heart of these contradictions; true economic efficiency could resolve them. The answer to containing deforestation is to bring the real economic value of standing forests into decisions about their management. This value includes critical environmental services for which there are no substitutes. Latin American forests, for instance, absorb and store carbon dioxide, a powerful greenhouse gas. They are home to thousands of endangered species. They serve as drainage basins through their "sponge effect," which prevents soil loss and destructive flooding. They play an important role in rainfall regimes. And they provide sustainable livelihoods for those who know how to work with them. In order for the market system to measure and compare the true economic goods provided by the forests, all these critical services must be taken into account. Those who benefit from the standing forests should help pay for the

short-term economic opportunities lost by conserving them. These include not only the direct users but also the international community at large. Recent scientific advances and new measurement techniques make this possible.

Deep social inequities are at the root of deforestation: poverty and lack of opportunity launch millions of poor into the newly opened wildlands. Deforestation occurs when poor migrants practice shifting cultivation, logging or *garimpo* (primitive) mining to survive. And it is hastened by wealthy investors who build roads through the remaining wildlands to open new areas for trade, extensive farming or ranching, resource extraction, energy generation or land speculation. Road building, which paves the way for deforestation, is encouraged by government policies that seek progress through an expansion of frontiers rather than through contained sustainable development.

Ironically, policies of the developed countries, whose protests against deforestation have been the loudest—have only made matters worse. Latin America's economic recovery is closely linked to the development of its interior. Promotion of the free market economic paradigm has included the deregulation and privatization of natural resources, exploitation of the forests by multinational corporations, and simultaneously a reduction in the size and efficiency of government agencies, including those that manage and protect public lands.

Neither the grim calculus of survival for the very poor nor the number-crunching of the very rich figure environmental services into their calculations. Because environmental benefits are not included in conventional economic accounting, forests lose out to economic demands to harvest commercially valuable lumber and political pressures to open up new lands for growing human populations. Timber and land are resources for which consumers and investors compete. Biodiversity preservation, carbon sequestration (the locking up of carbon in the biomass of the forest), flood control, and other environmental benefits are also economic "goods"—which may be far more critical over the long term—but they do not figure in most balance sheets. Thus the bottom line is skewed.

Because the multiple functions of standing forests are not considered in profit-and-loss calculations, neither managed forestry projects nor the fashionable concept of extractive reserves—the harvesting of non-timber forest products—have proved to be successful on the ground. The sustainable yields these strategies offer, and the ecosystem functioning they preserve, do not generate the immediate profits that more exploitative activities do. Conversely, one of the very few success stories in the struggle to preserve Latin American forests has been the setting aside of public protected areas and of private reserves for sustainable "ecotourism" or pure conservation. The success of these reserves lies in the fact that they are not required to be profitable in conventional economic terms. Rather, they are managed for ecosystem and biodiversity conservation, research, and public recreation and education.

A boy paddles a hand-wrought canoe in Brazil's Amazon region, where destruction of the rainforest continues.

VALUING THE FORESTS NOT JUST THE TREES

The value of ecosystem services has historically been overlooked, in part, because it is only relatively recently that we are coming to terms with their true worth and the social costs of their destruction. Now that we are in the midst of the greatest extinctions since the dinosaur age, we are beginning to realize the importance of preserving our planet's rich biodiversity. Now that levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere seem to be altering the climate, there is a greater appreciation for the natural systems that can regulate it. As multi-layered forests, with their abundant life forms, give way to unproductive grasslands, we begin to appreciate the role forests play in recycling nutrients. As rivers silt up, and floods wreak havoc, we have greater respect for the way forests regulate hydrological patterns. As the environmental services provided by healthy ecosystems become more and more scarce, they become infinitely more valuable, because all life ultimately depends upon them.

We now have the scientific know-how and the analytical tools to evaluate the services rendered by the healthy forest. Some of the most important recent progress in tropical conservation has been made in the field of economic valuation of natural resources and forests for purposes of decision-making. For instance, scientific research has identified and quantified the value of carbon fixation, watershed protection and the relationship between biodiversity and human welfare. At the same time, remote-sensing techniques make it possible to track natural resources worldwide and more difficult for governments to plead ignorance of the facts.

One example of how such learning could be applied involves forest conservation and carbon regulation. A critical function of the forest is the storage of carbon that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere and contribute to global warming. The economic value of this service may be calculated using the cost of reducing carbon emissions as a basis of comparison. Several analyses based on available data demonstrate that the value of forests as carbon sinks is much greater than the value they generate from timber and as agricultural land.

A worldwide carbon tax on users of gas, oil and other fossil fuels, an idea proposed by Brazilian scientist J. Goldemberg in 1990, could be used to compensate those who manage or conserve forested areas, and thus change the profitability equations. Compensation would be figured with the help of existing remote-sensing technology to determine how many hectares are cleared or maintained in specific areas. Annual statements could be issued, indicating a country's account balance of forested land. Using these accounts, annual entitlements or payments could be determined and paid from the carbon tax revenues.

Of course, carbon sequestration is not the only service provided by forests. Equally important is ensuring the stability of the regional water cycle and protecting the supply of water for energy, industry and urban consumption. Typically water is taken as a free resource by utilities. Users pay for this resource, but rarely is any of that money allocated for protecting the resource itself, in this case the watershed.

Finding an appropriate way to assess the value of the genetic resources of the myriad endangered species—many of which have not even been identified—is more complex. The extinction of unique life forms is an irretrievable loss. However, economists have been developing ways to quantify the value of genetic and other resources. Such measures could be used in estimating charges to all users of products originating from "bio-prospecting."

Forests provide many other environmental services as well, both tangible and otherwise. Among these are habitat, scenery, recreation and security from landslides. The challenge for the future is to estimate and incorporate the value of these services into cost-benefit analyses used to determine optimal forest use.

Another possibility for making forest management and conservation "pay," in conventional terms, is to adopt, through international trade agreements, a means of associating the pricing of selected hardwood species with the concept of "green certification" or "eco-labeling." Higher-priced certified wood could help make sustainable forest management profitable.

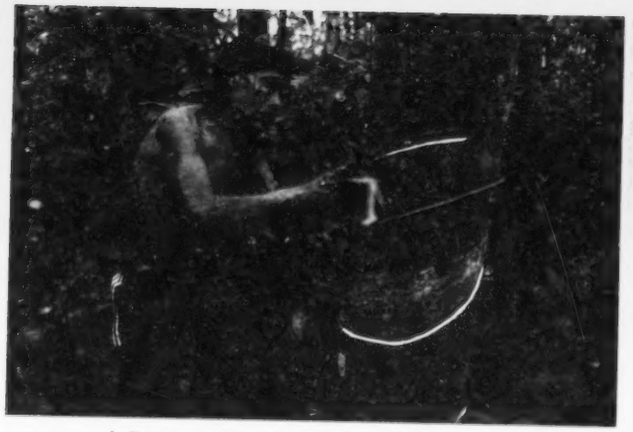
Clearly a workable strategy for reversing current trends of forest loss in Latin America and elsewhere must come from the economic side of the problem. It should include identifying the markets and setting prices for environmental services provided by forests and increasing the commercial value of natural forest products via certification and green labeling. The role of conservation areas should be expanded and safeguarded as well. Of course, policy and institutional support at both the national and international levels will also be required.

All of these issues could best be addressed at a worldwide forest convention, which would have as its principal goal the identification of compensation mechanisms for the environmental services provided by forests. A world forest organization could be set up to manage this international endeavour.

In practice, the measures suggested here would require serious global negotiation and drastic changes in social and economic behaviour. It would be hard to imagine such changes taking place were not the stakes so high. But the importance of forests to global environmental stability and to human well-being cannot be overstated. It's time that their actual economic value be reflected in the bottom line. ■

Marc J. Dourojeanni, based in Brasilia, is principal environment adviser at the Inter-American Development Bank. This article was excerpted from a longer report entitled "The Future of Latin American Natural Forests," available through the Environment Division, Sustainable Development Department, Inter-American Development Bank, 1300 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, 20577.

For information on UNDP's Global Programme on Forests, launched in October 1997, contact the Forest Programme, Sustainable Energy and Environment Division, UNDP, 304 East 45th Street, 10th Floor, New York, NY 10017.



Indigenous peoples have lived sustainably in forests for millennia. Above: Extracting latex from a rubber tree in Rondonia, Brazil.

TOWARD A NEW ECO-NOMICS

JAMES GUSTAVE SPETH

COMMENTARY

For years, developing countries have stressed the intimate connection between environmental sustainability and the eradication of poverty. So it was gratifying to see this point emphasized in the recent negotiations on climate change in Kyoto. United States Vice President Al Gore made this link in his remarks in Japan, explaining that "reducing poverty and protecting the Earth's environment are both critical components of truly sustainable development."

In UNDP we have learned through experience that sustainable human development requires not only attention to poverty, but to advancing women, promoting good governance and sustaining the resource base. Where one of these pillars is missing, population and environmental pressures often worsen, and solutions become harder to find.

This is the reality that UNDP and others must confront in our work in more than 170 developing countries. On a practical level, we will also need the cooperation of the private sector, which is responsible for more than 75 per cent of all foreign investments in developing countries. Through a number of studies, UNDP is looking at ways in which the interests of the private sector and sustainable human development can become mutually reinforcing. And the results are encouraging. Here are some of our latest findings:

Valuing our future. Profound change is in store as economists and policymakers revisit the use of outdated cost-benefit analyses that still drive most large investment decisions by the public and private sectors alike. Sustainable development requires a new approach that recognizes the long-term value of environmental assets and that can provide meaningful comparisons between the "sustainable net benefit" of a development project versus leaving a natural resource intact.

Careful consideration should be given to the reduction of government subsidies for the exploitation of natural resources, such as forests and water, and for conventional forms of energy. Subsidies by developing countries for conventional energy alone are estimated to equal the amount of money they receive through official development assistance. Lowering such subsidies would improve market competitiveness for environmentally sound technologies and decrease the burden on public spending.

Creating new markets. Today there is far greater faith in using market forces rather than large government bureaucracies to achieve critical environmental policy objectives. An interesting proposal in this regard is the use of pollution permits that would actually put a price on waste, thus creating a strong incentive for firms and individuals to reduce their pollution output. UNDP has sponsored important new research in this area, which may one day be translated into a global market in permits with the potential to channel billions of dollars in new financial resources from North to South.

We hope to dispel the notion that economic health and environmental protection are somehow incompatible. After all, ecology and economy come from the same root word.

At the same time, we are looking into other mechanisms whereby rich countries that pollute would have to "pay" for their actions by funding environment projects in the South—such as the development of alternative energy sources—that would also help countries achieve their development goals. The "Clean Development Mechanism," as it is known, was put forward at the Kyoto conference and is among the initiatives that UNDP is exploring for presentation at a follow-up meeting on climate change, to be held in Buenos Aires in November of this year.

Forming partnerships with the private sector. Increasingly, corporations are realizing that good environmental practices are also good for business. A combination of regulatory pressures, consumer awareness, and opportunities to improve efficiency and profitability have convinced many international business people that they are better off being ahead of the curve than behind it.

As a result, global corporate citizenship is on the rise—giving birth to projects large and small in developed and developing countries. In particular, rural and urban water supply, solid waste disposal, renewable energy, afforestation and pollution control are all areas where the private sector can make an enormous contribution to government efforts to improve environmental quality.

Already, UNDP is playing a leading role in facilitating the exchange of "best practices" from the environment and development communities. And through further research and model programmes on the ground, we hope to dispel once and for all the notion that economic health and environmental protection are somehow incompatible. After all, ecology and economy come from the same root word.

In my view, we are yet to reap the enormous benefits of new approaches and new partnerships. ■

James Gustave Speth is Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme.

WILDLIFE

WITHOUT BORDERS

By Mary Jo McConahay

Putting national concerns aside, Central American countries have agreed on a plan to protect the region's natural heritage and advance the fight against poverty.

The Peten, Guatemala—Imagine the sleek jaguar, amethyst-eyed, king of the New World jungles, loping night after night through tropical forests, covering the distance between southern Mexico and Panama. The animal recognizes no national borders. He lives at the top of the food chain, requiring vast, contiguous natural stretches to hunt and breed. His stealthy presence assures us the surrounding forest is comfortingly intact. A few decades ago that savage and elegant feline might have journeyed the narrow waist of the hemisphere unobstructed, but not today: cattle, logging, intensive farming and other pursuits of a fast-growing human population have eaten massively into the forest, nibbling straight through at times to the other side.

What to do about Mesoamerica's broken Amazon, increasingly an archipelago of wild places, mere islands of nature doomed to become nests of inbreeding, and finally irreparably ill unless re-attached to each other? The image of the muscular, black and gold jaguar, which also needs uninterrupted stretches to thrive, is one to keep in mind when considering the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor.

A work in progress aiming to reconnect the wild places and halt destruction, the Corridor is a joint effort of national governments and environmentalists, supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and a growing number of bilateral aid agencies, including those of Denmark, Germany and the United States. More than simply a plan to link natural sites, the Corridor will include nearby areas where people live and work, so they might improve their own lives while improving the chances of the natural areas to survive.

"It's a possible utopia," says biologist and UNDP consultant Juan Carlos Godoy, one of several experts who began putting their heads together about a decade ago, looking for ways to save precious natural habitats. They knew that Mesoamerica—Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, and the five southernmost Mexican states—covered less than half of one per cent of the Earth's surface, about 769,000 square kilometres. But they also knew this continental hinge that joins North and South America is one of the globe's most significant repositories of natural life, a narrow link between two great continental masses, rich beyond its size in mountain and lowland plants and animals. Slim Mesoamerica, washed by both the Atlantic and Pacific, is home to a full eight per cent of the

planet's biodiversity. Panama alone, for instance, has more species of birds (929) than Canada and the United States combined. But each year, 400,000 hectares of Mesoamerican forest are directly converted to farmland and ranches, or lost to urban development, or to over-exploitation, such as fishing and hunting. More are lost to road-building projects and mining and still more habitats are degraded as they fragment and become unviable.

The environmentalists, some in government positions, decided the critical situation demanded an equally dramatic solution, one shaped not by thinking in terms of parks or countries, but by considering the region as a whole. They pushed for the 1989 creation of the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD, with Mexico an observer); it elaborated conventions to which all countries agreed, on issues such as biodiversity, climate change and toxic residues. It prepared a first-time regional Environmental Agenda adopted by all countries, which used the agenda as the basis for their joint position at the Rio Earth Summit of 1992. With shared building blocks like CCAD in place, trust grew among the crafters of each country's environment policies, and the stage was set for serious, integrated consideration of the multinational Corridor.

The bones of the vision: a system linking rich, already protected areas with each other, and creation of new ones. Equally important: technical assistance and education for residents of the Corridor area, so they might live better while maintaining, not destroying, special environments. Finally: help with restoration of degraded areas, such as communally managed forests and fishing areas.

In a July 1997 summit, heads of state officially endorsed the Corridor as a central development concept for their region. In Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, national projects feeding the Corridor concept are already under way, as are GEF-assisted small-scale initiatives in Belize, Costa Rica and Guatemala.

Key to success is how those who live in the Corridor area, closest to the remaining natural stretches, will fare. If ordinary residents and those who make economies grow—farmers, fishermen, ranchers, even loggers and paper-plant owners—are not convinced that environment-friendly methods are in their own immediate interests, the destruction will continue. Education and assistance to such sectors are a major component of the Corridor network.

The continental hinge that joins North and South America is one of the globe's most significant repositories of natural life, rich beyond its size in mountain and lowland plants and animals.

Planners emphasize they are not investing time ("maybe 30 years" grins Godoy) in constructing "a crystal tunnel," not attempting simply to fence off hundreds of thousands of square kilometres for conservation, which at any rate would be an impossible task in a region where the population is expected to double by the year 2030. "You save nature to study it to be able to use it," says Godoy. "Biodiversity must be an option for development in Central America."

That concept includes supporting local practices that are already environmentally healthy. Take the work of traditional small coffee growers, who produce 86 per cent of the region's primary foreign export crop. Unlike large-scale operations that plant coffee stands in open sun with costly chemical inputs, often causing fragmentation of plant and animal habitats, pesticide poisoning and soil erosion, the *cafetals* of traditional small growers are environment-friendly, imitating the variety of the natural forest. Stand in a typical Guatemalan cafetal and you see not simply the shiny-leaved coffee bushes with their red berries, but, for shade, a host of fruit (lemon, orange, avocado, *mamey*, *zapote*) and other trees (laurel, rubber, *guanacaste*), whose products are also used and sold by the family. So rich is biodiversity in the traditional cafetal that conservation and scientific institutions such as the Audubon Society and the Smithsonian Institution's Migratory Bird Center have begun campaigning to educate the industry and public about their importance. Up to 10 billion birds, they say, migrate each year between North and tropical America, and traditional coffee stands provide breeding and feeding grounds. So cafetales, for instance, are being considered as much a part of the Corridor network as protected areas.

In Chiapas, in the southern Mexico region where Mesoamerica begins, forest has shrunk by more than half in the last 20 years. "This Corridor has incredible importance for us," says Hugo Contreras Benitez, director of Jungle Projects for Na Bolom, an independent centre for research and development in San Cristobal, which works with Maya Indian communities in the Lacandon rainforest area. "Every day more people are arriving, looking for land."

A journey through Chiapas confirms the urgency in Contreras' voice. Where only seven or eight years ago thick forest stood, today hills are barren, new communities are scrappily in place, cattle graze, military road-building machines traffic a smooth highway. But approaching the Usumacinta River, which forms Mexico's border with Guatemala, the forest begins again, part of reserves that Contreras and others are struggling to maintain, the beginning of the envisioned Corridor. Suddenly on all sides are stretches of tropical plants and animal life that feel linked to wildlands everywhere, a different kind of world filled with the calls of parrots by day, more silent after dusk. Late one night, outside the rainforest ruins of the great Maya city of Yaxchilan, where Lacandon Indians still come to burn incense and candles to their gods, the dark silence is broken by a long and tremendous roar. It is a jaguar, calling out across the river, perhaps looking for a mate. The river is running low under the stars, and for awhile time seems not to move. Then from deep in the forest on the other side, comes an answering roar. ■

Mary Jo McConahay is Central America correspondent for Pacific News Service. She is completing a book about issues facing the region's environment and its indigenous peoples.

The forgotten ones

Poverty can rob people of hope for the future and even of life itself. Its dispiriting and complex reality is hard to fathom in the abstract, from afar. The following essay attempts to document the life of the poor as they experience it. The article is the second in a series by this award-winning photojournalist marking the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997–2006).

Text and photographs by Eugene Richards

Marcala, Honduras The steep, eroding dirt road the *campesinos* call "the path" winds round and round up into the La Sierra Mountains, past stuccoed farm houses and windbreaks of bamboo and *aguacate* trees. As our car backs out of mudslides, bounces and sways from side to side, climbing higher, the upland slopes and valleys planted with bananas, plantains and coffee blur into seas of dark green and blue.

My driver and I reach the Cabreras' farm mid-morning. Ricardo isn't back from the fields yet, and not seeing his wife, Reina, or any of their seven children, I remain in the truck looking out at the house where they live. It is a hut, simple, stark, without windows, some two metres wide by three metres long. With walls fashioned of tree limbs tied together with vines, and a roof of *zacate* grass, it looks as if it had been plucked whole from a forest thicket.

Someone waves. The sun is so glaring I have to shield my eyes to see through the black wedge of a door into the house. Reina, 27, a small, plump, shy woman, gestures for me to come in. She has just finished a load of wash. Faded teeshirts and little girls' dresses hang the length of the dim, otherwise unadorned room. In the far corner is an *bornilla*, a wood-burning stove made of clay; along a wall, two low, narrow benches. The only piece of store-bought furniture is a cut-glass cabinet, which holds their cups and dinner plates made of plastic and tin and Ricardo's battery-powered radio.

Ortilia and Zoraida crawl out giggling from behind their mother. Only then do I

notice two-month-old Elmer, asleep under one of her arms. What little light there is in the house streams in, laserlike, through the narrow slits in the walls. It's even darker, Reina says, when she gets up at four in the morning. She washes and grinds the corn for tortillas before the forests and the mountains reappear. Sometimes Ricardo follows her down the muddy path from the sleeping hut to the main house to help her light the fire; she's fond of him for that. "I love him," she says, lowering her eyes, "for many reasons." ▼

the way to work for the *rico* (the rich)," he calls out, in a voice that sounds exhausted and hollow. Yesterday Ubaldo, who everyone knows as Dad, cheerfully cleared a steep hill on his own farm, slashing at tree roots with his machete and yanking up the weeds that threatened his coffee plants. Now, slouched in the doorway, he resembles a scarecrow, the kind made of broomsticks set up in a cornfield, rather than a proud farmer. Except for the ropy muscles in his forearms, the 61-year-old is skinnier, more ▼

Ricardo returns home at noon. The slight, handsome man walks straight to the pump just beyond the house, sticks his head under the flow of icy cold water, then walks straight back to the yard where I'm sitting. The children crowd around him, but he doesn't play with them. A neighbour leaning over the fence asks him whether I'm from the government, but he doesn't respond. When Reina reminds him that he hasn't eaten all day, he ignores her. The strong-willed farmer, after agreeing last night to ▼

Reina's father, an impoverished farmer, deserted her, her mother and two sisters when she was eight. She married Ricardo when he was 21 and she was 14. By that age, she had attended school for only 15 days, because her father, later other relatives, wanted her working in the fields. So she could neither read nor write. Ricardo, who completed second grade, taught her to write her name.

Reina, who has finished tidying up the cooking area, is breastfeeding Elmer when Ricardo's father stops by. "I'm on

skeletal than he appeared at first. When he laughs at Zoraida's attempt to nurse alongside Elmer on Reina's breast, I notice that he'd lost his front teeth.

Finally Dad can't put off going to work any longer. "*Dios le bendiga* (God bless you), Reina," he says, and strides away down the hill. Another elderly farmer follows close behind him, leading an ox-drawn wagon. The pay for each of them, for a whole day spent hoeing and tilling another's land, will be 25 *lempiras*, about two US dollars.

be interviewed, is anxious to have his say.

"Am I a poor man? Isn't that what you want to know?" he blurts out, raising his eyebrows and grinning like a naughty schoolboy who knows the answer to a question before it is asked. Then the smile leaves his face. "Yes, I am a poor man. *Bastante*, bastante, bastante, (a lot, a lot, a lot)," he cries, until he seems to run out of breath.

Ricardo draws all of his children close, the tiniest ones down between his feet.

Accompanied by his grandchildren, Ubaldo Cabrera (facing page) leaves home to pick coffee for a large landowner. Reina Cabrera (above) nurses her newborn while preparing the evening meal of tortillas and beans.

"I've been told," he begins again, "that at the time I was born, people in the mountains were dying of hunger. I had three brothers and a sister; two brothers died of fever. There was no doctor because there was no money. Still, when you are little, you don't know what is rich and what is poor. I was in school when my little friends explained to me the difference. It was around that time that the President had pledged to make poor people work harder. Even back then, this upset me. My parents worked from six in ▾

Lenca, pure Lenca," he adds. "Lenca, first and foremost. True Hondurans, native people, we were struggling to hold onto our land and our own language. I didn't know how to talk to the people who were inside cars, didn't know how to say hello, and they could never know our customs, passing us by like that. And so I became certain that all of the pain is on us." There is a minute of silence, with Ricardo looking over at Reina, who has the baby in her arms. "Anyway, that was then," he says, clearing his throat.

At age 21, just weeks after he was married, Ricardo was drafted into the Honduran Army. A combat infantryman, he was paid $4 a month, from which the military took taxes, money for food, clothes and medicine. This left him with only 25¢ a month to send home. His parents helped support Reina the five years he was away. When he returned, they deeded him a quarter of their two hectares of land. Now Ricardo works six months of each year for the large landowners; six months on his own farm,

With help from his children, Ricardo Cabrera (above) processes the day's coffee harvest by separating the berries from the beans. Ubaldo (right) and his grandchildren pick coffee berries.

the morning to six in the evening. It's the rich who don't work." He says this sarcastically under his breath.

"I was also made aware of being poor in other ways. When I was a small boy, and for a very long time afterward, I felt very afraid when I saw people riding in cars. The only transportation we had then, and that we have now, is 11. We walk by 11. Eleven," he repeats, noticing my puzzled expression. Holding up two fingers of his hand, he walks them puppet-like down his leg. "And, of course, we were

growing corn, bananas, plantains and chillies for his family to eat, plus coffee as a cash crop.

Ricardo and his father own a total of 8,000 coffee trees, which will produce, weather permitting, 20,000 pounds of berries this season. Still, growing coffee is a desperate gamble. Each tree costs them more than $2 in labour and materials before it bears fruit, and there is no fruit for the first three to four years. Then they must contend with low prices. The consumer price of premium mountain ▾

Ricardo is now a member of a cooperative of small growers, close to the marketing town of Marcala (population 11,000), and is a leader of the Indigenous Council of the Lenca People, a union of farmers from the mountains. "Make no mistake," he says. "My people and I don't want any sweet music. We want our children to be educated, we want to know how to farm better. We don't want to be cheated."

As the shadows begin to lengthen, Ricardo excuses himself. This morning he ▾

from the hard-topped road that runs to Marcala. Beyond it, as the grade grows even steeper, are patches of virgin forest being cleared to grow coffee and fields of broken, shredded corn stalks. These stand like fossils rooted in the furrowed ground. Augusto Hernandez lives eight kilometres further up the road, but isn't home when I arrive. He's gone on ahead, his young son tells me, to assist a family that's ill.

A former soldier like Ricardo, Augusto, 41, was elected to be his community's guardian, or medicine man. Drawing on ▾

grown coffee beans in the United States is $6 to $14 a pound; buyers, known as "coyotes," pay farmers 25¢ per pound for their coffee beans. This is an improvement over what they once received. The first coyotes into the mountains claimed that since they had to pay for transportation, communication with the outside world, and interest on loans, they were doing the growers a favour offering them 75¢ per *quintal* (100 pounds) of coffee. Isolated and desperate for money, the farmers accepted.

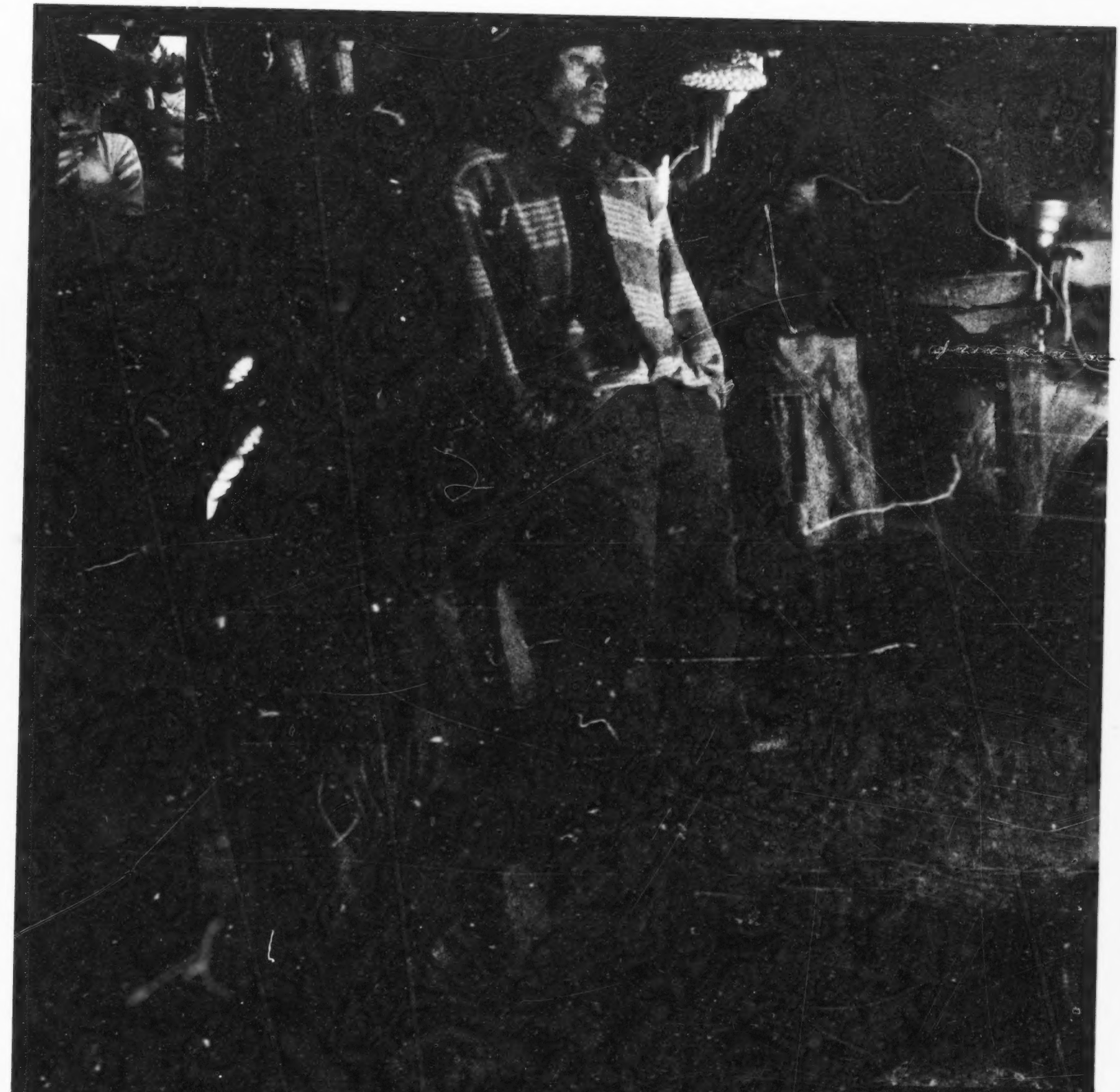
mended fences, cleared weeds, spread fertilizer, dug holes and picked coffee. He will need to run the coffee berries through the de-pulping machine before night falls. When I approach him to say goodbye, he beseeches me not to represent the lives of the campesinos in the mountains by just showing his. "You won't know the whole truth of life here until you meet those who live farther up, farthest away. The ones we call the forgotten ones."

The Cabreras' farm sits at an altitude of 1,400 metres, 14 kilometres up the path

training he received in the Army, he sets his neighbours' fractured knees, arms, ankles, and treats as best he can their chronic diarrhoea, parasites and flu. And does this for no pay. He prescribes indigenous herbs and plants for many ailments—eucalyptus for coughs, zacate tea for parasites—though two years ago, when there was cholera here, all he could do was advise people to purify their water. Two people died.

Augusto's son leads us up the wooded trail his father has taken to the López

Three generations of the Cabrera family plant precious coffee seedlings on the slopes of a steep hillside.

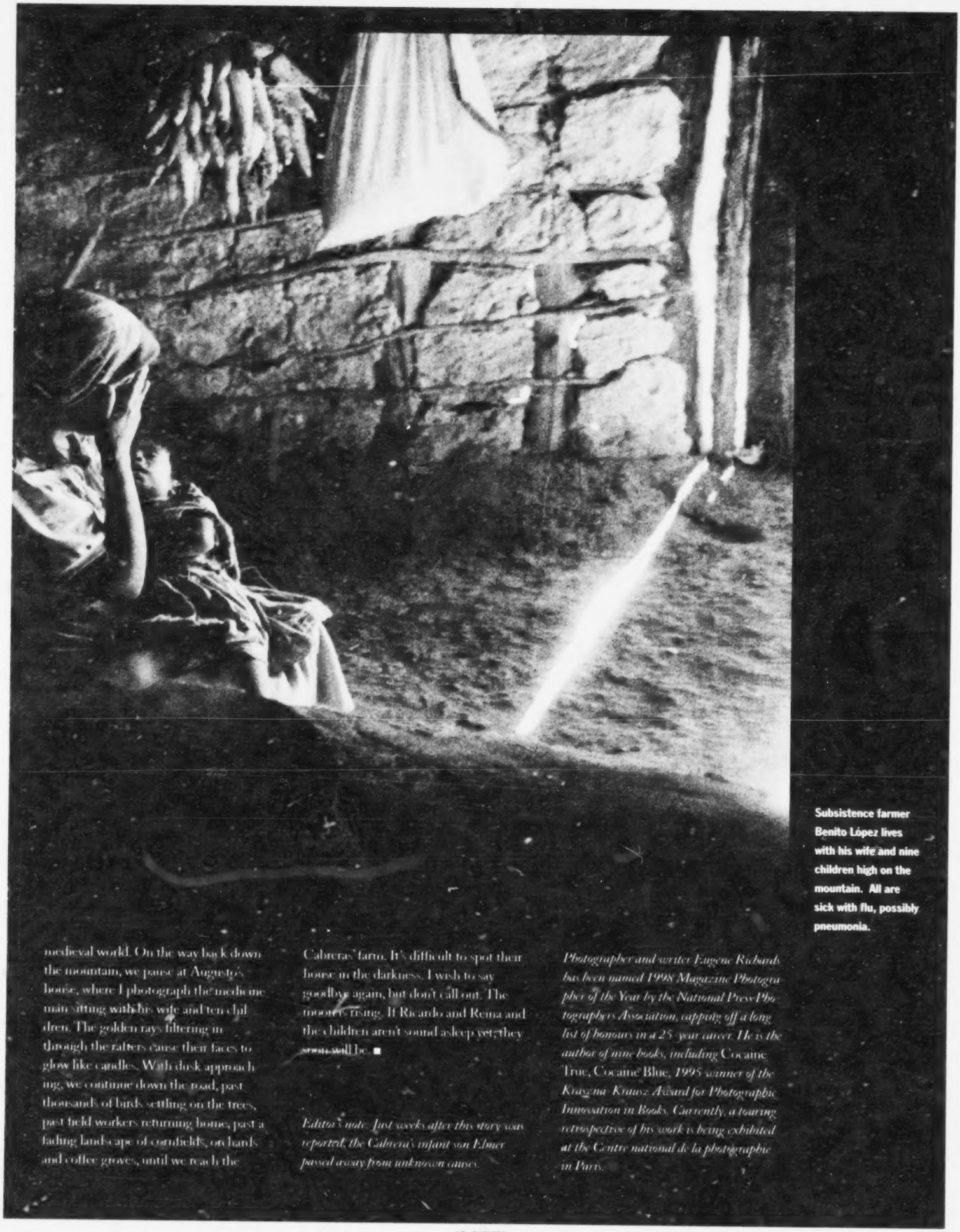


home, a mortar and stick house at the edge of a cliff. Benito Lopez, I learn, first moved onto this isolated tract of land long before the road was built. A 49 year old subsistence farmer with nine children, he grows the food his family needs. Then, whenever he can, he works as a day labourer.

There's a square of light falling through the open door; otherwise, the interior of their house is gloomy, damp as a cave, bare, but for the bundles of Indian corn hanging from the roof beams. The oldest children, their eyes red and watery, sit together along one wall, the younger ones on the dirt floor. Mrs. Lopez, who's closest to the fire, seems oblivious to the clouds of yellowish smoke it's throwing off. Although she is very ill, possibly with pneumonia, she refuses to relinquish care of her infant girl.

The baby's temperature has risen to 39 degrees Centigrade. Augusto swabs her tiny arm with alcohol, then injects her with penicillin. After pausing to look around the room at each of the other family members, he injects Mrs. Lopez and the next youngest child. Mr. Lopez can only afford three doses of the antibiotic. Before leaving the house, Augusto tries to comfort the dispirited man, who's sitting with his hands over his face. He gently pats his sagging shoulders.

When we step outside into the daylight and fresh air, it's as if a spell had been broken and we've returned from a

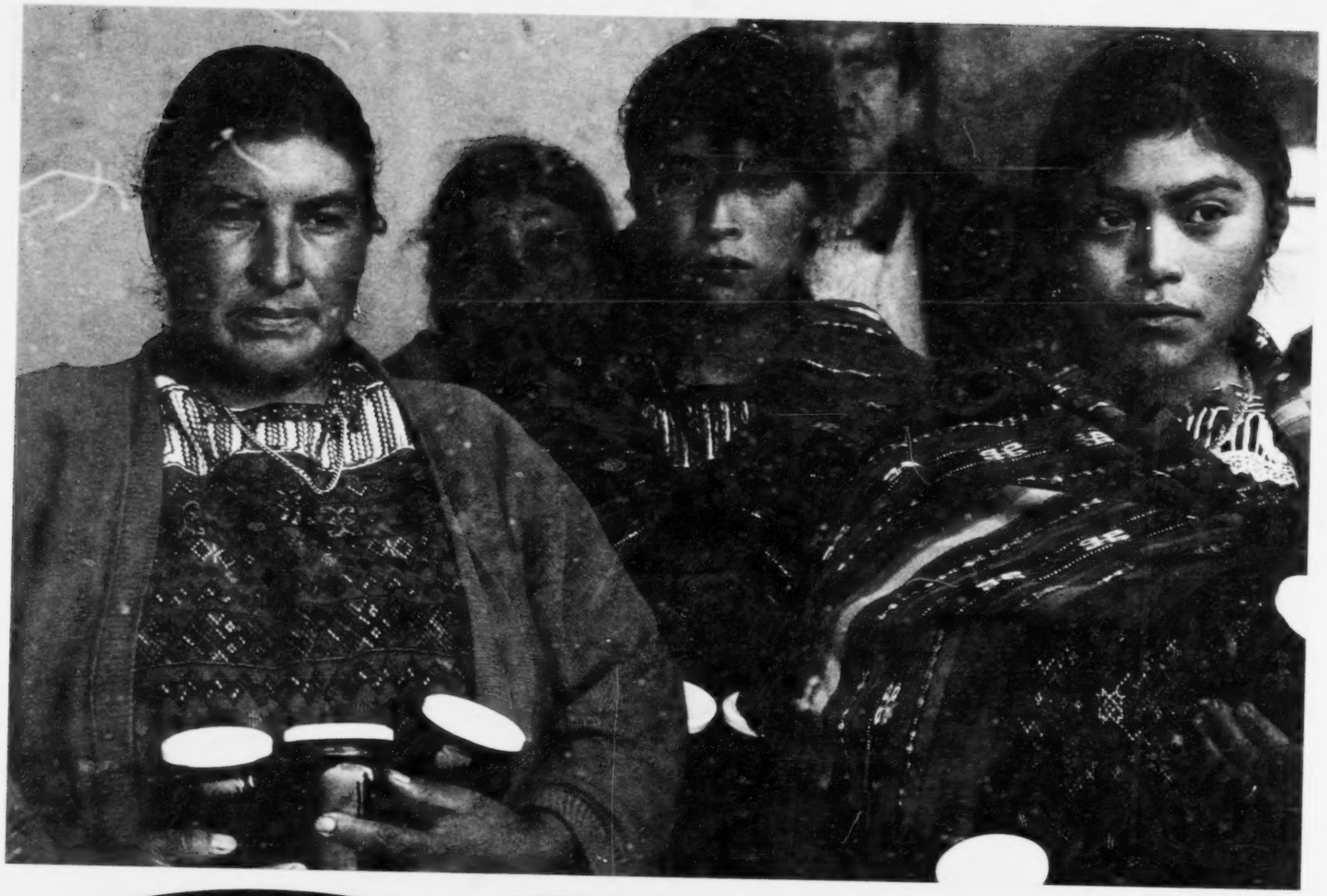


Subsistence farmer Benito López lives with his wife and nine children high on the mountain. All are sick with flu, possibly pneumonia.

medieval world. On the way back down the mountain, we pause at Augusto's house, where I photograph the medicine man sitting with his wife and ten children. The golden rays filtering in through the rafters cause their faces to glow like candles. With dusk approaching, we continue down the road, past thousands of birds settling on the trees, past field workers returning home, past a fading landscape of cornfields, orchards and coffee groves, until we reach the Cabreras' farm. It's difficult to spot their house in the darkness. I wish to say goodbye again, but don't call out. The moon is rising. If Ricardo and Reina and the children aren't sound asleep yet, they soon will be. ■

Editor's note: Just weeks after this story was reported, the Cabrera's infant son Elmer passed away from unknown causes.

Photographer and writer Eugene Richards has been named 1998 Magazine Photographer of the Year by the National Press Photographers Association, capping off a long list of honours in a 25 year career. He is the author of nine books, including Cocaine True, Cocaine Blue, *1995 winner of the Kraszna-Krausz Award for Photographic Innovation in Books. Currently, a touring retrospective of his work is being exhibited at the Centre national de la photographie in Paris.*



ON SHIFTING GROUND

ESSAYS FROM VIETNAM & GUATEMALA

This second of a two-part series looks at the reeling effects of change on two countries undergoing radical transitions. The essays were contributed by an international group of journalists who participated in a recent UNDP-sponsored "travelling seminar."

Lasting peace in Guatemala will depend on the economic empowerment of the poor. Above: Mayan women produce and market jams from wild berries.

ON SHIFTING GROUND VIET NAM

Thaleng, Viet Nam—A small Hmong village tucked into a mountainside overlooking Dien Bien Phu basin. A few dozen homes on piles, far away from everything. Dream-like countryside, a ghetto of poverty. To reach it, you have to take ochre-coloured dirt footpaths, which become mud slides in rainy weather. You must then ford a stream and go for a few kilometres over paths that wind through the lush jungle and emerald carpets of rice paddies. In places, the hillsides surrounding the village have been scorched by slash and burn agriculture; the Hmong plant corn in the burned areas. They get by—they have to—on rice and the meagre spoils of the hunt. "Enough to survive, but not enough to live on," Hoang Thi Mai, a Hmong, tells us.

Here, the symbols of wealth are silver piastres from French Indochina that the Hmong women sew on their head-dresses. The only precious possessions are the buffalo and, for those Hmong tribes who live a bit higher up on the mountain, opium, which they have again begun to cultivate actively in the past few years. In Viet Nam, half the population still lives below the official poverty line, and a sizeable percentage of the population (36 per cent according to the latest statistics) suffers from malnutrition. The so-called backward regions where the ethnic minorities live are the hardest hit. The higher standard of living that has resulted from the implementation of an economic reform policy (*doi moi*), since 1990, has had virtually no impact on these isolated communities. Here, they live just as before, that is, in deprivation, as evidenced by the number of inhabitants with swelling of the neck—goiter, a symptom of chronic iodine deficiency.

But in Thaleng, they have been better of late, miraculously better off, since the introduction of a hitherto unknown technique—carp-breeding. In some of these mountains, villagers have never seen fish before. The idea of breeding them came nonetheless to Hoang Thi Mai, who has every right to be proud of herself.

With money she raised from the sale of her buffalo, she and her husband did what once seemed impossible: they had a small bulldozer come and dig a pond in the middle of the jungle, which they stocked with fish. Carp-breeding has since become the livelihood of Hoang Thi Mai's neighbours as well. The village's 83 families are on the road to relative—once unimaginable—prosperity, which also has the potential advantage of eliminating health problems caused by a lack of iodine and protein. Mai's four children will surely be able to go to school.—*Philippe Grangereau, correspondent for* Liberation, *Paris, France*

The title itself is an accusation: the Cato Institute's 1997 book of essays on global activities of the United Nations is called *Delusions of Grandeur*.

Among the questions it poses: Have the billions of dollars spent on UN development programmes since World War II made a real difference in poorer parts of the world?

Nicholas Eberstadt, of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, says that the UN is "an anchor tying low-income countries to burdensome policies of the past, rather than a pilot boat guiding them toward the currents that could carry them forward." He charges that "feckless, irresponsible, or plainly injurious economic policies have been embraced, defended and subsidized ..."

That does not match what I saw recently in Viet Nam, where UNDP works in many ways to support *doi moi*, the Hanoi government's effort to renovate a state-controlled economy that proved unable to meet the needs of its people.

I saw something constructive.

I saw Hoang Thi Mai's new fish pond, carved into a hill above the rice paddies in Lai Chau province, below her maize patch and manioc plants. Here, with the help of UNDP, she is adding protein to the family diet, and earning some additional income by selling extra fish to a middleman. She is teaching others in her Hmong village how to do the same.

It took courage. Mai had to sell her water buffalo in order to build the fish pond. "I was betting my whole fortune," she explained. "I only had my buffalo. But sometimes in life you have to take risks."

Her pond is one small part of an expansive effort to develop an open economy that will sustain Viet Nam's rural poor, particularly its ethnic minorities. This is not the income-transfer approach that UN critics denounce. Instead, the intent is to equip a people, and a region, for self-sufficiency.

I saw something even broader: an effort by Viet Nam's government, with UNDP's help, to create a legal system that will serve a market economy and attract foreign investment. And a related programme to strengthen the National Assembly as a legislative institution, while linking its members with provincial-level offices and local constituents.

Nobody is sending wheelcarts full of cash. UNDP is helping to build the economic infrastructure and install the capacity for self-government.

The goal may seem distant as one sits in a high-ceilinged, wood-paneled room that dates to the colonial era, listening to the fans rotate, while Pham Hung tries to assert the primacy of law over party in Viet Nam.

Hoang Thi Mai sold her only water buffalo for a chance to improve her family's life.

The president of the Supreme People's Court insists, "We seriously punish those who violate the law, even if they are high officials." Ho Chi Minh stares down from a framed portrait.

There is "no possibility" for the ruling Vietnamese Communist Party to operate "above the law," the judge claims.

Bruno Pouezat, UNDP's assistant resident representative in Viet Nam, says that a "great deal of progress has been made in many aspects of the legal system," including training. Judges now are presidential appointees with law degrees and at least four years of legal experience.

"They are making an effort," Pouezat said, "to develop a level playing field." He looks ahead with optimism.

The US Ambassador to Viet Nam, Pete Peterson, who was shot down 50 kilometres from Hanoi in 1966 and held prisoner for six years, believes that looking back is unwise:

"It makes your life unhappy. And it makes commerce impossible." I saw that, too, in my short encounter with Viet Nam.—*David L. Hawpe, editor and vice president of the* Courier-Journal, *Louisville, Kentucky, USA*

Four years ago, Mai swapped her blue-chip buffalo for a speculative investment in an emerging stock—fish farming. Today, her fish farm in the village of Thaleng is a high-yielding asset, and Mai, the risk-taker, its applauded business manager.

There have always been risk-takers in Dien Bien Phu, the northern flatland where Vietnamese fighters defeated French colonialists more than four decades ago. Today, the new foot-soldiers are farmers. Their armoury comprises seed capital, good advice and hard labour. The aim is to continue the nation-building started 40 years ago, and accelerated more recently under the doi moi economic reforms. In the past decade the reforms have brought strong economic growth. Exports have flourished and foreign investors have beaten a path to Hanoi.

Mai's motivations are as common in Thaleng as, say, Tokyo: higher income and self-improvement. It's just that in a country like Viet Nam, which has a real per capita income of US$1,040 a year, people are somewhat more desperate. Yet as a conversation with Mai revealed, alleviating poverty means more to her than just a larger income. "I have become a respected leader in the community," she says.

Mai was trained by UNDP, and her quick grasp of aquaculture made her a key link in the agricultural extension system. Some 180 people in the village have picked up the same skills in this way, and the village of 83 households now boasts 56 fish ponds.

UNDP holds Mai up as an example of its "capacity-building initiative," a clumsy way of saying that she is economically and socially empowered. And, importantly, that she is attuned to the "culture of asking." That means knowing where and whom to ask for things like fodder, funds and advice.

It suggests an assertiveness denied under the cumulative effort of a centralized state rightly more concerned with its very existence than small-scale farming. Yet today, both the state and the farm sector are net gainers from the labours of risk takers like Mai.

—*Khozem Merchant, Asia page editor,* Financial Times, *London, UK*

"Just give me five days," says Tran Khuong Dan, holding up the fingers on his left hand, "and I can cure a man of his addiction." He should know. Tran, the inventor of Heantos, an acrid brew of plant leaves from the hills of northern Viet Nam, became addicted to opium in order to find an effective remedy. The result,

Fish farming in Dien Bien Phu means added nutrition and income for villagers.

Drug addicts in a treatment centre in Viet Nam. A new herbal formula is helping them kick the habit.

he says, is a treatment that has revolutionized the way thousands of Vietnamese heroin addicts, cocaine users and even cigarette smokers shake off their drug habits.

"Most Western-style treatments for addiction involve substituting one drug for another, in the hope that in a matter of months or years the dosage can be reduced. This has not been my way," says a grinning Tran, a 55-year-old former construction worker who took up medicine just 15 years ago.

"In my family, I grew up with two addicts. Heroin killed my brother, and my father was a user of opium for more than 30 years. But he stopped and went on to live to the age of 87. It made me think that there is the human capacity to overcome addiction that could be enhanced by medicine," Tran explains. Determined to find a cure, he took to the hills where, for centuries, remote ethnic Hmong have used opium. After collecting more than a hundred traditional recipes that the Hmong use to relieve withdrawal pains when opium is scarce, Tran Khuong Dan addicted himself to see which formula worked best. The results were far better than he expected.

In a squalid Hanoi backstreet sits Nguyen Quoc Hung, 36. He is literally scarred by years of injecting heroin, liquid opium and a virtual pharmacy of other drugs. Tattooed and red-eyed, he was once arrested in a government crackdown on "social evils." Now he is a state-approved advocate for Viet Nam's "miracle" cure.

Nguyen Quoc Hung, a recovering addict.

"I tried to get off drugs so many times for my daughters' sake," he says, "but the pain was always too great. My bones hurt too much. I have been close to death several times. But with Heantos, it was easy," he says. "I felt a bit sick, but it was not that bad." Tests on Heantos, carried out by Vietnamese scientists, have produced surprising results. Several thousand people addicted to heroin have reportedly been "cured." Advocates of the herbal potion claim it may also prove a useful treatment for the symptoms of withdrawal from other chemically-unrelated drugs, like cocaine and nicotine.

There are, of course, doubts about Heantos' miracle properties. By their own admission, the tests conducted by the Vietnamese government are less than scientific. But nobody is prepared to discount Heantos before the prestigious Virginia Commonwealth University and the Chemical Dependence Centre of the Johns Hopkins University in the United States have completed their own UNDP-backed scrutiny.

At the very least, UNDP says, the research on Heantos will establish a formal process of testing traditional medicines in Viet Nam for their medical effectiveness.—*Matthew Chance, Bangkok-based correspondent for the* Independent, *London, UK*

In view of its somewhat stagnating economy and the wait-and-see attitude of foreign investors, Viet Nam has decided to establish a new legal system in the hope that it will facilitate the transition to a market economy and a modern society. The process is being supported by a $3 million programme funded by UNDP and the Government of Denmark.

For many years, the heirs of Ho Chi Minh believed they could dispense with law, the former North Viet

ON SHIFTING GROUND VIET NAM

Nam abolished its civil and criminal codes in 1954, and jurists became superfluous. The closing of the Ministry of Justice in 1960 reflected this thinking. A new constitution was put in place in 1980—five years after the reunification of Viet Nam. But it provided for only two economic sectors: state-run and cooperative enterprises. There was no room for development and private initiative.

"Even at that time, many people found this system stupid," said Ha Hung Cuong, chief of the Ministry of Justice, which has been reconstituted as the Department for International Cooperation. "But it was understandable in that particular historical context," he added. Elections held in July 1997 "are leading the country into the 21st century," Cuong said, noting that the goal is "a nation where the rule of law prevails."

In Ha Hung Cuong's view, the new legislation and regulations must be gradually introduced into daily life—in his words, "not too quickly and not too slowly." Following such a long period of war, the government considers social stability important. But economic development is what matters most, Cuong says.

Legal reform has encountered many obstacles, one of which is the lack of trained judges and lawyers. It is still customary for the government to select local public figures for judgeship posts. In court, these often untrained officials base sentences more on common sense than legal precedent. Even the president of the Supreme People's Court, Pham Hung, admitted that he is self-trained from Russian books.

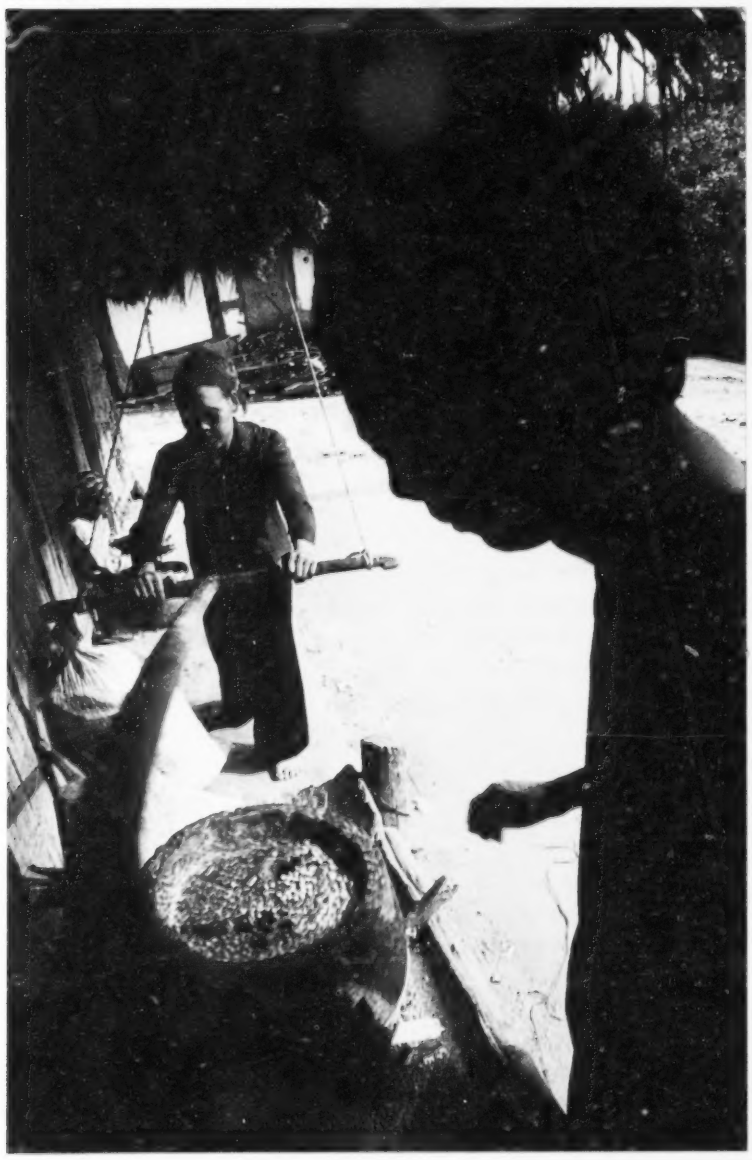
In recent years, the Vietnamese government has adopted a number of laws with a view to regulating economic life and creating investment security. The Land Law of 1993, for example, guarantees peasants' rights over the land they cultivate.

Viet Nam is also drafting a civil and criminal code, a law on public administration and a labour code. Other laws deal with foreign and domestic investments, company management and bankruptcy.

Viet Nam is emerging from 35 years of war, revolution and political upheaval and a long period of international isolation. Efforts to catch up in various fields have undeniably brought about positive changes. Annual economic growth exceeds nine per cent and the standard of living is rapidly improving. But at the same time corruption and nepotism continue. The establishment of a civil society governed by the rule of law has become the *sine qua non* of progress. What may seem commonplace to the citizen of a modern Western country is nothing short of a heroic and massive undertaking for a country like Viet Nam.

— Pierre Simonitsch, Geneva-based UN correspondent for Frankfurter Rundschau, *Frankfurt, Germany*

Grinding maize in the village of Thaleng, where incomes and opportunities are on the rise.



Gone are the days when Hanoi was a watchword for drab ideologically driven authoritarianism. Today the city is buzzing with activity. The streets are packed with bicycles and motorbikes—few people are yet able to afford cars—and virtually every house in the city has been converted into a shop selling anything from steel rods to Sony televisions.

The change is remarkable, and the people of Hanoi are grasping at opportunities with an excitement that fills the air. Recently the city staged its annual mid-autumn festival. But this was no stuffy affair organized by the party. Late into the night the streets were packed with smiling faces. Bright lights shone in the shops as people drove up and down. Most motorbikes had three passengers—the father driving, a small bright-eyed child in the middle and the mother clinging precariously at the back.

The children were all brandishing the latest craze to hit the younger generation in Hanoi—large gaudily coloured water pistols—and they gleefully sprayed anyone and everyone as they sped along. Even the teenagers seemed to take a childlike delight in what was

going on—especially when they saw a group of young Frenchmen who were also armed with large water pistols. The French and the Vietnamese brought the place to a standstill as they doused each other with water—hundreds of passers-by watched, doubled up with laughter.

Of course there is another side to Viet Nam. The party still places many limits on social and political behaviour. The poverty remains severe; crime levels and the use of hard drugs are increasing. But Viet Nam seems to have faith in its ability to make the same kind of economic strides as many of its Southeast Asian neighbours. It seems to believe that it has a future—a future in which it can take on its foreign visitors with business deals and even with water pistols rather than the bullets and bayonets of the country's war-torn past.

— Owen Bennett Jones, Geneva-based correspondent for the British Broadcasting Corporation, London, UK. ■

ON SHIFTING GROUND GUATEMALA

After centuries of discrimination, the rights and culture of indigenous minorities are being promoted as part of Guatemala's peace process.

Guatemala City—Change is coming to Guatemala after decades of domestic strife, and a leading crusader in that struggle is cautiously optimistic about it.

Byron Barrera, 44, an information officer for UNDP, has good reason to be sceptical of the 1996 peace accords that ended the longest civil war in Central America. He was a victim of it.

The newspaper office where he used to work was destroyed by a well-placed bomb; he received strange telephone calls and threats in the mail. He was forced into self-imposed exile in Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua and the United States. Most tragically, he survived three bullet wounds in an assassination attempt that left his wife dead.

Since his return to Guatemala in 1995, he has been working for UNDP and writing a column for the largest newspaper in the country.

"We have to see Guatemala's situation as a process that is going to take a long time," says Barrera. "We have to create a whole new society. But things are changing."

Indeed they are. In a small classroom on the second floor of the Feminine Technical Institute, in Guatemala City, Avilio Isidro Porras Montufar, a former soldier in an elite military unit, is learning to style and cut hair in a government-sponsored vocational programme.

Porras, 31, admits to taking an occasional ribbing because he is the only man in the class. But with jobs scarce following the peace accords, he is grateful for the chance to learn a new skill.

In another room, women who were in the military police are learning to cook and sew, in hopes of finding jobs or starting their own businesses.

Some distance away, in a clearing near a demobilization camp, former guerrillas—many of whom spent years in jungle combat—are learning to be farmers. Machetes once used for destruction now are used to cultivate corn and to chop wood and weeds.

The peace accords, which ended 36 years of conflict, also resulted in a number of new commissions to reform virtually every sector; they seek to make Guatemala a multi-ethnic society that provides greater voice to indigenous people representing about 60 per cent of the population; they also seek to limit the army's authority.

Up in a range of mountains called the Cuchumatanes, in a community so high it appears enveloped in clouds, a small group of women, mostly of Mayan descent, are learning to sew. They are part of a programme to help eliminate poverty. With UNDP support, these women are developing new skills to help their families and start small businesses. In a nearby hamlet, a small group of entrepreneurs is making wool blankets from the sheep they raise for wool and food.

"Things are better. There is no fear now," said Seferina Ramirez, as she cooked a meal of boiled potatoes on a small fire in the middle of her dirt-floor cabin.

Down the mountain, in a small school in Chiriquiac, youngsters are being taught in the local Mayan language as well as in Spanish. The teachers are helping to instil pride in their indigenous history and culture.

Inside the small, almost dark classroom, lit by the sunlight from an open doorway, Eulalia, 13, says she wants to be a teacher when she grows up. Her friend Modesta, 11, wants to be a doctor.

"Since the peace accords, it's all right to dream," said Juana Shanshabal Kolob, the mother of one of the students.

In attempting to implement the accords over the last year, there have been many problems, and observers suggest that even bigger problems may follow. As in South Africa after the fall of apartheid and in the United States following the end of slavery, change does not happen overnight.

But as Barrera, the journalist, points out, at least the killings have stopped. Little girls can dream of becoming doctors and teachers.

So how does a country rebuild itself in an atmosphere where confidence and trust in government were non-existent for decades and the wealth of the land was controlled by a very select few? The answer seems to be through education, empowerment and information—all things that UNDP has emphasized in its assis-

tance to the people of Guatemala.

Although a year is far from adequate to judge the success of these efforts, it is already apparent that great strides are being made.

And in the eyes of a man who is cutting hair rather than brandishing a rifle, a woman who is sewing rather than dodging bullets, and a child who smiles at pictures in a book instead of crouching in fear, one can see what peace in Guatemala means.—*Maryann Auberjon Arnsbik, editor at the* Courier-Journal, *Louisville, Kentucky, USA*

It's no simple task to shake off 36 years of a civil war that left 150,000 civilians dead, thousands "disappeared," and dozens of mass graves filled with bone fragments as yet unidentified. The peace accords not only put an end to a long, dirty war. They offer the best hope of advancing the country to a situation where the primary concern of the majority is no longer day-to-day survival. When President Alvaro Arzu's administration refers to the peace process, it is really talking about a revolution, but this time a revolution on its own terms: bloodless and controlled.

This is still a country filled with furtive, backward glances. And the government is faced with the daunting task of instilling confidence and dismantling conspiracy in a land that has learned too well how to doubt and cheat.

Guatemala has a long way to go and a short time to get there. Eduardo Stein, the minister of foreign affairs, gives the process just over a year, the time remaining in President Arzu's term. Many programmes fall by the wayside every time someone new enters political office. The fear is that if the wheels aren't locked in motion by the end of Arzu's term, the work could be undone. In the meantime, many are rushing in to make their voices heard, to keep in step with this harried, frantic progress. The urgency, the desperate push to make each voice heard, is the best indication that faith is being restored and people are learning to believe in promises.—*Erin Trowbridge, reporter,* Earth Times, *New York, USA*

Macaria Tomasa insists she doesn't speak Mayan. "*Solo Español*," she says. Only Spanish. That's surprising here in this highland community called Chiabal where nearly everyone is of Mayan descent. Seated next to her in a sewing class is Eulalia Ramos, who says that she doesn't consider herself Mayan. She and Macaria, both with nine-month-old babies at their sides, are learning to use a one-stitch sewing machine as part of a project to eliminate the extreme poverty that characterizes this part of northwestern Guatemala.

It's possible these two women didn't understand my question, since they are of Mam origin, one of Guatemala's ethnic Mayan groups. But Edgar Pineda of UNDP believes their denial of their Mayan heritage may also be explained by centuries of racism and discrimination against the country's indigenous majority.

"Historically these people were marginalized," explains Pineda. "The indigenous or Mayan peoples kept their culture and their language very close and didn't want to mix with the Europeans or Spaniards. They know that the ruling population of Spanish or mixed-descent Guatemalans have looked down on them, and may be confused about their identity or even feel ashamed.

One of the provisions of the 1996 peace accords is to promote indigenous rights and identity and to incorporate the indigenous majority into the process of restructuring Guatemalan society. That's easier said than done. There appears to be a good-faith effort so far on the part of the Guatemalan government to carry out the accords. However, changing the mentality on both sides of the rift is a long-term process.

Education at a young age is essential. According to Maria Olga de Pérez of UNDP's Guatemala office, the education sector began examining inequities in the system over a decade ago, and education reforms grew along with the peace process.

"It started as curricular reform and has turned into a programme expanding education to all the villages," Pérez explains. Many communities are still without schools, and Pérez is concerned that the efforts so far have been concentrated in the areas most affected by violence—even though poverty and illiteracy exist throughout the country. The programme is growing, though, and has the support of several international agencies, including UNDP. Currently fewer than 60 per cent of Guatemalans can read and write. Through its education reform the government hopes to attain 70 per cent literacy by the year 2000.

One of the goals for the indigenous population is bilingual education in Spanish and their local language. But, Perez says, "it's difficult, and there have been setbacks because there are not enough teachers and because materials are not available in all 21 indigenous languages."

Further down the mountain, in Chirisquiac, is a three-year-old school. There, children ages five to 15 are learning to take pride in their heritage, says a member of the parents committee, which runs the school. Inside the classroom, lit by the weak light from a single window, the teacher conducts a lesson about lines and shapes in Spanish, and then in K'iche, the local language.

Next door a class of teenagers invites us in to hear them sing Guatemala's national anthem in K'iche. They manage to sing the first few verses, which are written down, but falter toward the end. Then they ask us to stay, so they can sing the entire anthem again, flawlessly and entirely from memory. But this time they sing in Spanish.—*Mary Gray Davidson, senior producer, "Common Ground" radio series on world affairs, Muscatine, Iowa, USA*

She was born in Xelaju, but her name is Lopez, and even the fact that she is wearing her best K'iche costume cannot hide the fact that she is a young urban professional. She is impatient to dance, but she respects the fact that as a Maya Queen she must start the round only when everyone is ready. She is part of a new generation that grew up with one foot in ancestral ways and the other in the modern world.

At 27, Alma still looks young. Unlike many of her peers who married early and had children, Alma remained single. She is a social worker in Quezaltenango, the country's second-largest city and the first to be governed by someone of

Mayan descent. This experiment, once unthinkable, was made possible by the commitment to indigenous rights in the peace agreements and the wisdom and impartiality of Mayor Rigoberto Quemé.

In Guatemala, many ladinos (people of mixed Spanish and indigenous blood) see the perpetuation of indigenous culture as shameful, as an aspect of underdevelopment. Others speak of the rights of the Maya using a learned discourse similar to that applied to women, young people or children, whose right to exist is recognized—but little more.

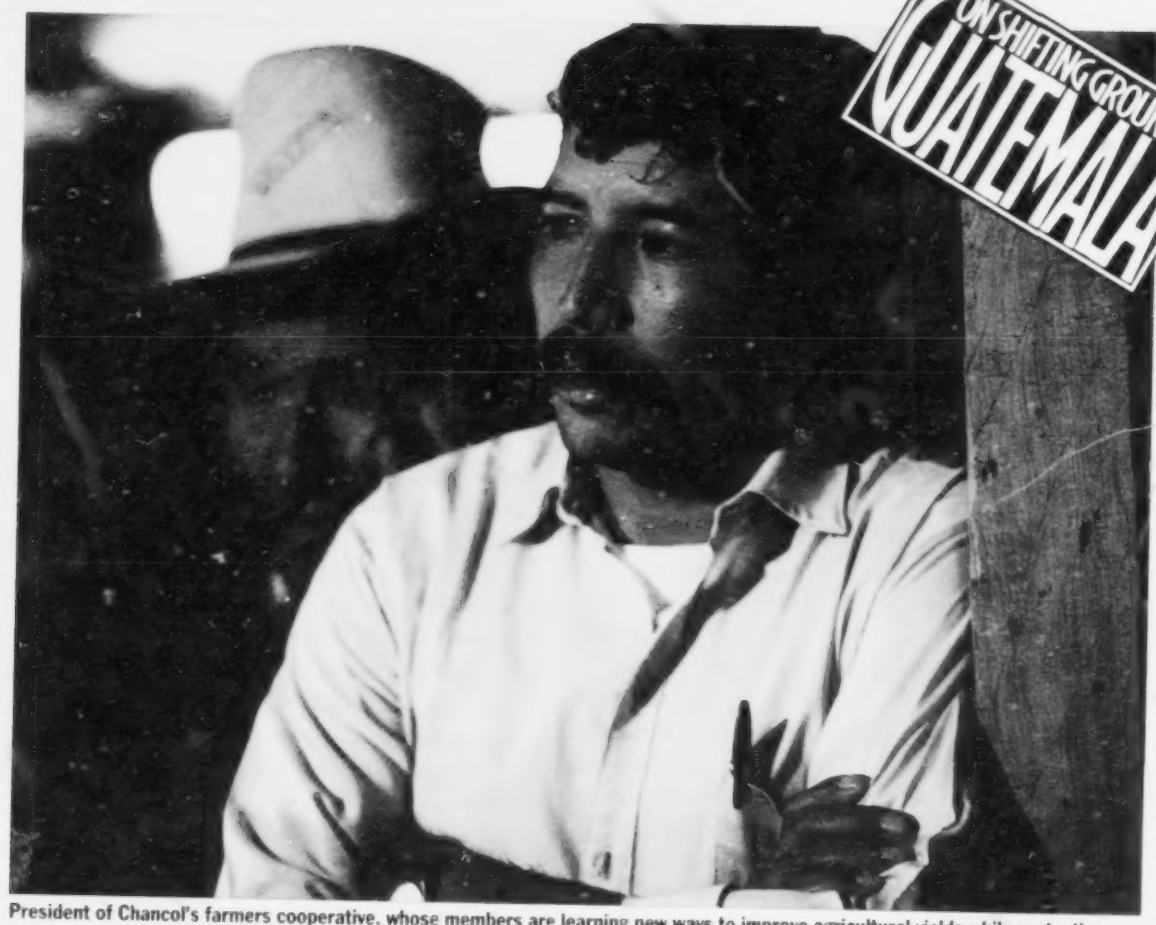
In a few places, like Quezaltenango, there is an indigenous middle class, urban and literate, while at the same time proud of its ethnic identity. Thus it makes sense to hear the virtues of rock music extolled by this little woman in her colourful *huipil*, who also devotes herself to traditional dance and music. Alma is now working to get more women involved in education and community banking, under the guidance of a women's group headed by the wife of the mayor.

Even in the poverty-stricken villages of the Cuchumatanes mountains, the perceptions of women themselves are changing. I was unable to find even one woman who preferred her children to help her at home rather than attend school—even though many of them (almost one-third) were raising their children alone.

"I don't want my daughters to be like me, not knowing how to write," said Juana Shanshabal Kolob, a member of the board of the bilingual school in Chiquinal.

These changing attitudes on the part of the rural indigenous women, together with the first experiment in a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multiracial country being conducted by the mayor's office in Quezaltenango, are, in my opinion, the most far-reaching of all changes taking place in this beautiful and tormented country.—*M. Dolores Albiac, San Salvador-based correspondent for* Cambio 16, *Madrid, Spain*

ON SHIFTING GROUND IN GUATEMALA



President of Chancol's farmers cooperative, whose members are learning new ways to improve agricultural yields while protecting nearby forests.

"The easy part is over." This is the anthem of Guatemala's peace process more than one year after the government and left-wing rebels signed a UN-brokered peace treaty. It is repeated by government officials, former guerrilla leaders, Mayan intellectuals and international organizations alike.

The so-called "easy part" refers to the successful demobilization of the rebel forces and moves to reduce the influence of the most powerful military in Central America. No small achievement, but more the product of war fatigue and changing geopolitical relations than genuine national reconciliation.

In a country where 80 per cent of the population lives in poverty and the indigenous majority encounters deep-rooted discrimination at every turn, the consolidation of lasting peace is a daunting task.

Santon Lopez Ramos is used to eking out a living from the deteriorated soils of the Cuchumatanes mountains. But she is also one of the beneficiaries of an unprecedented number of internationally supported efforts to turn the "paper" peace into reality.

"The difference that peace has brought is that we are getting a lot more help. Before, nobody came to visit us," says this trainer at a business centre set up with the help of UNDP in the village of Chiabal, a chilly 3,300 metres above sea level. Inside, Mayan girls busily pedal cast-iron sewing machines while the boys tip tap exercises on manual typewriters. A group of older women displays jam made from berries, and local men eagerly recount the new agricultural techniques that they are being taught.

Peace has given Guatemala an opportunity to soften the dramatic contrasts of wealth and power that sustained its bloody armed conflict for so many years. But the opportunity will not last forever.

A significant proportion of the $1.9 billion promised by the international community to support projects such as those in the Cuchumatanes could be put in jeopardy if the small but powerful Guatemalan private sector does not fully cooperate with government efforts to raise tax revenues.

Marco Augusto Garcia, president of the sugar-producers association, supports the peace process and agrees that government tax revenues must be increased. They are currently far too low to sustain the improvements in basic infrastructure and health and education services required to attract the productive investment necessary for long-term stability.

But Garcia insists that the burden should be distributed evenly throughout the population.

If the poor are forced to pay for poverty-alleviation, the myriad of internationally funded development projects conceived of as a jump-start to peace are in danger of being reduced to drops in an ocean of chronic instability.—*Johanna Tuckman, now with the Associated Press in Madrid, Spain, was formerly a freelance journalist based in Guatemala City* ■

NOTEBOOK

FODDER TO FUEL

From the vantage point of a rural village in Malawi, Africa's future can look bleak. "If people continue to cut down trees, there will be no fuelwood at all by the second decade of the 21st century," says Richard Stanley, a veteran development worker. "But even more than that, life will be dramatically altered.

"It is common knowledge that deforestation can change the micro-climate," says Stanley, who has spent 24 years working in developing countries—the last four in Malawi. "There will be sudden bursts of rain that run off the soil, causing erosion instead of sinking into the ground. More extreme climatic conditions are created—either droughts or floods," he says, "with cold temperatures at night and burning heat during the day."

Yet as he faces this grim scenario, Stanley is optimistic, even excited, about a process that could contribute to reversing deforestation—in Africa and elsewhere. Since 1994, he has been working with the Malawian government and a number of donors, including UNDP, on introducing an alternative source of fuel in Malawi. It is made locally from materials that are readily available, indeed free: fallen leaves, dry grasses, virtually all agricultural waste products, even old paper and cardboard.

These are collected over a period of several weeks, mixed with a little water, and pounded with a traditional African mortar and pestle.

Use of briquettes (right) can reduce the cutting of trees for fuelwood. The briquettes are made from agricultural waste which is compressed using a simple lever-operated press (above).

When the material reaches the correct state of decomposition, it is compressed using a simple, lever-operated press. Out comes a briquette—doughnut shaped, about ten centimetres in diameter and six centimetres high. When the press is operated for seven or eight hours, it can produce as many as 500 briquettes, enough to cook meals for 300 people for a day.

In time, more than 8,000 Malawians will be trained to make the briquettes, which could potentially save close to half a million trees each year.

But to the villagers involved, the advantages of this simple technology have more to do with their day-to-day lives than their concerns for the future. The briquettes are up to 30 per cent cheaper than the cost of fuelwood sold in towns. And for many rural women who are traditionally responsible for gathering firewood, the various stages of producing the briquettes are less time-consuming—and less back-breaking—than the quest for wood, which entails walking farther and farther from home each day.

Even so, in a country of 11 million people (with a fuelwood demand averaging 62 trees per person per year), the new briquettes are catching on far too slowly. Indeed, as Richard Stanley and Ben Bryant—the US-based inventor of the lever press and briquette-making process—found out early on, the technology itself was the least of their problems. "People are reluctant to change old habits that, to them, represent security," says Stanley.

What is needed is a "media blitz" to get the word out, says Stanley. And training to build local capacity cannot be underestimated.

In Malawi, three men and three women were initially trained in briquette-making. They, in turn, taught 175 others to be trainers.

Four groups of carpenters have also established themselves to build the hand-operated presses, which are easy to assemble from local materials and easy to repair.

For the men at least, the most compelling incentive to adopt the new technology comes from its potential to yield higher incomes. (Stanley points out that women often complain that profits they earn are usurped by their husbands.) In fact, by using a common, 20-horsepower grain mill—traditionally operated by men—to break down the fibrous material, the output of briquettes can be increased twofold.

"All of a sudden you can feed 18 presses from one maize mill, and you've eliminated the need for pounding the material," says Stanley. "Villagers have begun to see this as a real money-making venture, and that gets interesting.

"We have proven beyond a doubt that when people take the briquettes to market they sell them straight away," he adds. They've even given them a catchy name: *Nkhuni za Makono*, or "Firewood of Today." ■

— Kristin Helmore

Tourists are drawn to Nepal's spectacular landscapes (above) and rich cultural heritage (below). But often they leave more than footprints behind.

PARADISE OR BUST?

Kathmandu, Nepal—For scenic but poor countries like Nepal, the path to progress could be paved with tourists. But tourism has this irritating habit of ultimately making uncommon places commonplace.

In the 1960s, exotic Nepal became synonymous with Nirvana. It was at the edge of the modern world, its nature, culture and attitudes unspoiled by materialism, consumerism—and tourism. From virgin valleys in the high Himalayas, to tropical jungles teeming with endangered wildlife, to brick-and-tile temple townships inhabited by smiling and easy-going people, Nepal had it all. Flower children from around the world flocked here. Just travelling to Nepal became an act of defiance, against overbearing parents, against the military-industrial complex. Janis Joplin and Cat Stevens crooned about Kathmandu's idyllic charms.

Today, the hippies are long gone. But they have been replaced by young, upwardly mobile low-budget trekkers. And therein lies Nepal's problem: it has always undersold itself. Even if they could afford five-star hotels, most visitors to Nepal still prefer the cozy US$20-a-night Kathmandu Guest House. In 1996, Nepal earned $120 million from tourism, nearly one-fifth of the country's hard-currency earnings. But the average tourist stayed only three nights, and spent only $40 a day.

Now Nepal hopes to change all that. With the support of UNDP, it has launched a programme to improve tourism services to the point where the country will attract visitors who spend more. It is a partnership between the private sector, which has the resources to spend, and the public sector, which can promote quality tourism through appropriate policies and planning.

To be sure, the aim is not merely to turn tourism upscale. As Dipendra Purush Dhakal, secretary of Nepal's Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, explains, it is about improving the tourism "product" and marketing it properly.

As a result of one UNDP-supported project, lodges along a popular trekking route to the Langtang Valley are being upgraded with help from local residents. Two ancient temple complexes in the Kathmandu Valley are being renovated and conserved. Local communities are also involved in clean-up efforts and are being informed about the benefits that tourism can bring.

But the point is not always well taken. In what has become a national debate, some argue that upgrading tourism will only benefit the elite. Others fear that tourism will ultimately destroy the very qualities that once made the country so appealing. Indeed, one of the government's goals is to boost tourist arrivals to the 500,000 mark—up from an estimated 425,000 last year. (It is no coincidence that 1998 has been declared "Visit Nepal Year," with the slogan "Guest is God.")

In the past, large numbers of low-budget tourists have been blamed for environmental destruction along the trekking trails and for the proliferation of tourist "slums" in Kathmandu, Pokhara and areas surrounding the Royal Chitwan National Park. In many cases, it is not the tourists who are to blame (most are ecologically conscious), but impoverished locals attracted to the areas by the prospect of jobs. Competition has also led to undercutting, so tourists can easily get dirt-cheap deals.

Through the tourism initiative, an independent Nepal Tourism Board is being set up, to be financed through two per cent of all tourism-related revenue. The purpose is to establish some sort of "quality control" over the products Nepal has to offer. And to make sure that what it promotes is in the country's best interest.

For example, an average trek amidst the spectacular scenery of the Nepal Himalayas can cost as little as $15 a day. In neighbouring Bhutan, where visitors are discouraged, the same sort of trek can cost more than $250. Establishing peak and off-season rates in Nepal could help to bring the daily rates up and distribute tourist arrivals more evenly throughout the year.

As Carroll Long, UNDP's resident representative points out, "Tourism can and should be more than just a commercial activity. If carefully managed, it can be a source of livelihoods for local people as well as positive cultural exchange. But it must be elevated to an enterprise that enhances both national and personal well-being."

Yogendra Sakya, president of the Hotel Association of Nepal, also believes that a happy medium is possible. "We have to strike a balance between tourism and the environment and cultural heritage. The answer is not knee-jerk criticism of tourism, but to do it responsibly so we maximize the benefits and minimize the harm." ■

—Kunda Dixit

PIGS FOR PEACE

Western Slavonia—Pregnant pigs are proving improbable peacemakers in this north-central part of Croatia. And it's not just because they're cute.

Pig-farming—once a staple of the area's agricultural economy—was nearly wiped out during Croatia's five-year-long civil war. Today, an unusual UNDP venture is helping to rebuild the livestock sector and restore community relations in a region where ethnic violence was once rife.

Since May of 1997, animal scientist and UN Volunteer Henry Hamilton has driven to the municipal market in a truck chock full of pregnant sows. Farmers, including Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians, Croats and Serbs, have all helped to transfer the 100-kilogramme beauties to the farmers' small carts, the pigs squealing their objections all the while.

The idea is simple: Selected farmers, with proper livestock facilities, are each given a pregnant sow. In return, they must agree to have one of the female offspring impregnated, and to give it to a designated neighbour.

The US$250,000 project, funded by the Government of Sweden, is part of a larger UNDP effort to rehabilitate war-torn areas of the country. The money is used to purchase pure-bred Swedish Landrase sows. The pigs cost $500 each, but are given to the farmers free of charge—as a form of credit that is paid back in kind.

The lucky recipients are chosen by their peers. The decision is made by Local Development Councils consisting of long-time residents as well as war refugees and others displaced from their former homes—a form of "direct democracy" that is also helping to strengthen communal bonds and diminish ethnic tensions.

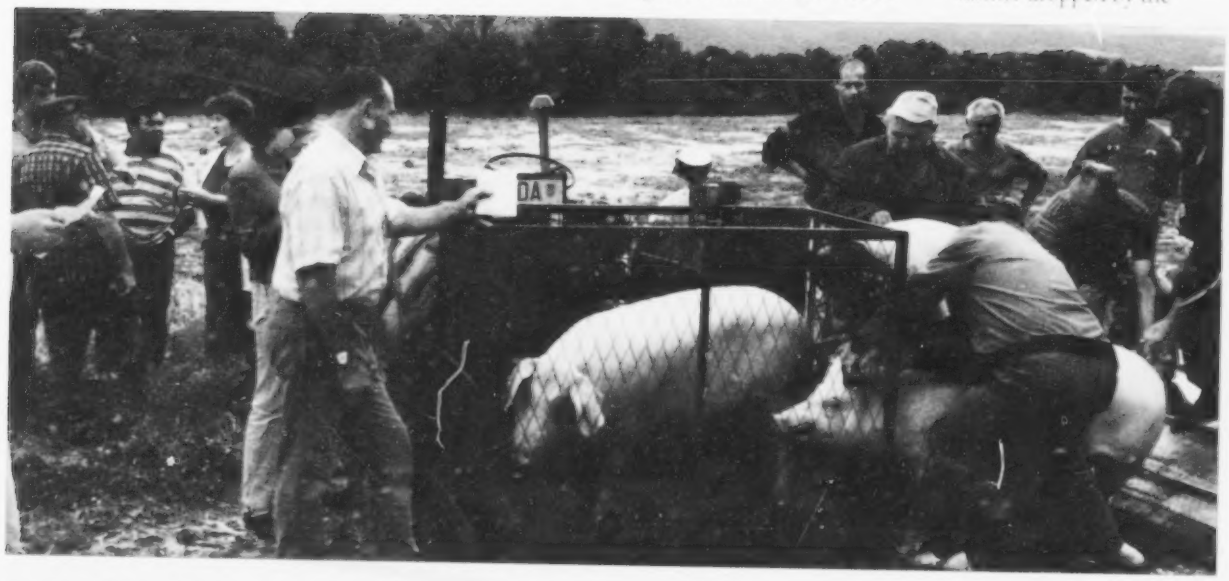
Yet, inevitably, tensions of another sort were bound to arise. In one instance, says Hamilton, a Croatian farmer dropped by the UNDP office to complain that his new pig was depressed. She was lonely and needed company, the farmer concluded. Hamilton promptly hooked the pig up with a neighbouring sow, who lived alone in a spacious barn. The new living arrangements worked wonders.

So far, more than 190 sows have been distributed and over 1,860 piglets born.

"We are optimistic that their numbers could surpass even pre-war levels in just a few years," says Filip Marusic, director of the UNDP office in Zagreb. "Moreover, these animals are of such high calibre that a local agro-industry is interested in working with us.

"The pigs put food on the table, enhance the local economy and promote ethnic harmony among farmers," he adds. "These are no ordinary swine." ■

— Cherie Hart



No ordinary pigs.

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

Until recently, the taste of mushrooms was only a distant memory for many people in Southern Africa. The mineral-rich food, which enabled villagers to bridge the "hungry season" between harvests, started disappearing as forest habitats were stripped of wood for fuel.

Today, a simple yet revolutionary technology—fueled by the by-products of local beer industries—is bringing mushroom-farming to villages across Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Called "zero emissions," the technology uses natural biological transformations to change seemingly useless substances into products of value. It was all explained at a UNDP-sponsored conference on sustainable livelihoods in Pearl River, New York, last November.

"We can't keep asking the Earth to produce more and more," says Gunter Pauli, founder of the Zero Emissions Research Initiative (ZERI) at the United Nations University and one of the conference participants. "What we must do is make far better use of all the things the Earth already produces."

For generations, Africans have brewed their own beer from sorghum. The pulp that remained after fermentation was traditionally fed to cattle, although it provides little nutrition. It had no other apparent worth. But with help from local scientists trained by ZERI, villagers have learned that spent sorghum is an ideal medium for growing edible mushrooms, especially when combined with other fibrous material such as water-hyacinths—aquatic plants that are also considered "useless" because they choke bodies of water throughout the tropics.

"The ZERI methodology designs complete, integrated bio-systems," says Pauli. Hence, after producing mushrooms, the sorghum can still be fed to cattle. The water-hyacinths are fed to earthworms, which in turn are fed to chickens. The chicken dung is fed into biogas digesters that produce methane gas, reducing the need for fuelwood. A by-product of the digesters stimulates the growth of algae used in fish farming.

The integrated process produces not only beer and cattle feed, but new products too: mushrooms, protein-rich chicken feed, fuel and food for fish. Most important, it promotes sustainable livelihoods by producing a variety of marketable products based on the ecologically efficient use of renewable resources.

Naresh Singh, who directs the sustainable livelihoods programme at UNDP, defines "livelihoods" not only in the limited sense of jobs (which in today's world do not always provide a livelihood), but as "assets" and "entitlements" as well. A villager's assets, therefore, might include the water-hyacinths growing in a nearby waterway or the coconut palms growing around his house. Pauli sees coconut palms as a renewable resource that can produce useful products not presently being marketed,

CALL FOR ENTRIES

As reported in the April 1997 issue of CHOICES, an annual prize has been created to award individuals and organizations in developing countries working in sustainable agriculture. Each year, a total of US$10,000 is being donated by former UNDP official Friedrich Mumm von Mallinckrodt to support outstanding examples of organic and other ecologically sound methods of farming that are making a difference in the lives of the poor. The application deadline for the 1998 Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Award (SARD) is 31 May. For guidelines, contact Mr. Mallinckrodt at Wolfgang-Klausner Strasse 11, D-83339, Chieming, Germany. Fax: (49) 8664-929802. E-mail: sard.mallinckrodt@t-online.de ■

such as Vitamin E and furfural, a natural fungicide that can be extracted from palm leaves.

Accordingly, ZERI has asked the Wood Chemistry Research Institute in Riga, Latvia (leaders in the field) to come up with more uses for the ubiquitous palm tree of the tropics. And, in collaboration with ZERI, UNDP has organized workshops in Southern Africa, the Pacific Islands and Latin America to spread the word.

Making use of existing resources—rather than adding expensive inputs—is key to the zero emissions approach. And it is in line with UNDP's emphasis on sustainable livelihoods, which aims toward self-reliance by building on the existing skills, unrecognized assets and coping mechanisms of the poor.

"In traditional community development work, you identify what people are lacking," says UNDP's Naresh Singh. "The sustainable livelihoods approach starts from what they already have."

For more information about ZERI, contact Gunter Pauli, president of the ZERI Foundation, located at the UNDP office in Geneva, Switzerland; e-mail: info@zeri.org ■

— Kristin Helmore

TALK BACK

READERS RESPOND

Democracy as a universal value

A recent article by Ellen Posner on "Fundamentals of Governance" (January 1998) claimed, almost in passing, that "from a Western perspective [the goals of good governance] ideally are accomplished through a framework built around multi-party elections, an independent judiciary and accountable legal systems." Even a superficial glance at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two covenants on human rights (now ratified by over 130 countries) confirms that elections and an independent and accountable legal system are universal values, not those of a particular system or region—so why the reference to only a "Western perspective?" Perhaps the implication was that Africans, Asians and others prefer one-party states, with subservient and arbitrary legal systems?

Specific forms of democratic or popular government naturally will vary from country to country and culture to culture. However, propagation of the myth that democracy and the rule of law are somehow "Western" values that are either irrelevant to or rejected by the rest of the world is a pernicious undermining of the universality of human rights that has been consistently proclaimed by the UN General Assembly. In 1998, the 50th Anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration, such a comment in the pages of CHOICES is particularly unfortunate.

Hurst Hannum is a professor of international law at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, USA

Inspired CHOICES

In the past seven years I've gained a wealth of inspiration from the pages of CHOICES. The January issue, particularly the essay by Nadine Gordimer, has made a profound impression. I will share it with as many colleagues and friends as possible.

Veronica Jeffrey, UN Drug Control Programme in Vienna

Hope—even for Somalia

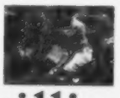
Before I read the article on Somalia that appeared in the October 1997 issue of CHOICES, I thought—along with the great majority—that in that distant and dreadfully impoverished African country there existed no hope and no viable solutions.

Fortunately, along come stories like yours, showing the other half of reality in a way that is neither sensational nor tragic: despite a lack of substantial international aid, goodwill and intelligent work can bring at least a ray of hope to people in despair.

Federico Matías Rossi, age 18, Buenos Aires, Argentina ■

CHOICES welcomes feedback from readers. Letters for publication should include the writer's name, address and daytime telephone number or fax, and should be addressed to the editor, CHOICES magazine, UNDP Division of Public Affairs, One UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017. Fax: (212) 906-5364. E-mail: lois.jensen@undp.org Letters may be edited for reasons of clarity and space.

MATTERS OF FACT

Forest Facts. Forests cover nearly **one-third** of the world's land area—ranging from less than 1% in Cape Verde, Djibouti and Iraq to more than 90% in Belize, Papua New Guinea and Suriname. In the developing world, as many as 4 million hectares of land—an area the size of Switzerland—are **deforested** each year. › A study in seven states in India showed that the poorest families derived as much as 25% of their income from nuts, berries and **medicinal herbs** commonly found in forests. › In every least developed country for which statistics are available, wood supplies at least 70% of the fuel used for **cooking** and **heating**.  In Kenya, some 100,000 women have planted more than **20 million trees** as part of a "Green Belt" movement. › **Air pollution** is devastating Europe's forests, causing economic losses of US$35 billion a year. › On average, only 4% of the wood imported by the Nordic countries is from the tropics. In contrast, **tropical woods** account for 58% of wood imports in Portugal, 38% in France, 34% in New Zealand, and more than 27% in Australia, Japan, the Netherlands and Spain. › Just 12% of all land area in industrialized countries is protected, mainly as **national parks**, ranging from 0.7% in Ireland and 2.5% in Belgium to 26% in Germany and 32% in Denmark. Nordic countries are home to less than 1% of the world's population and are responsible for 1% of the global **greenhouse gas** emissions. The US, which represents about 5% of the world's population, emits nearly 24% of the world's greenhouse gases.

Information is drawn from the *Human Development Report 1997*, commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme. The report is published in English by Oxford University Press (paperback ISBN 0-19-511997-5; hardbound 0-19-511996-7), and in eight other language editions by a variety of publishers.